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CINDERELLA OR PRINCESS?

By WILLIAM HARDY ALEXANDER
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The other day at a cosmic whirl, or, more precisely, a summer school faculty tea, I heard nothing of the upper C introduction shrilled at me by an industrious assistant hostess paving the way for her husband's assistant deanship, except that the young man I was meeting professed economics, of what kind or where I never learned, nor does it matter. He had heard even less of the introduction than I, being so much younger and hence not yet ear-attuned to the high frequency vibrations of the conversation tone of afternoon tea assistant hostesses. His eye brightened hopefully as he enquired: "In what field do you teach?" I yearned to tell him it was not a field but a vineyard but, remembering how serious young professors are, I refrained and replied simply: "Classics." "Oh, classics! That's something just out of this world, isn't it?" His smile faded fast, not through active hostility but just through lack of any further interest.

Now, of course, a thing is not fatally damned for everybody even supposing it is "out of this world." Heaven, for example, is ordinarily held to be out of this world, and if it is not, I can see no reason for so striving to live and to believe as possibly to merit it. What we want of Heaven is a new experience, not a second visit to the same old film of human life. And indeed, if Heaven and the Classics can in some way be equated by an identical exteriorization from our present planetary affairs, there may presently be a great revival of interest in the classics, even if on such purely *a posteriori* grounds. However, let us assume that the young professor was just using a common tag of language to indicate that in the educational world, as he understood it, the classics, as he understood them, had ceased to have any terrestrial meaning. He was thinking of himself as a scientific man in a science-controlled or science-controllable world.

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II

Despite the reluctance of many natural scientists to admit his claim, people in general side with him, and the term "social sciences" has survived the original hissings and cacklings with which it was once greeted in the academic poultry yard. The world sees no reason why the spirit of science should not be applied in the field of man's social relations as well as in that of his physical environment, and the world is right, even if the task of the social scientist is rather harder. The claim of science to be important depends only secondarily on output; primarily it is important because it offers a new approach to the whole problem of life and destiny. The real comprehension of what this spirit is, and a genuine conviction that its acceptance lays certain inescapable obligations on whoever embraces it, is what makes a man of science. As it happens, and probably it was the better order of approach, the spirit of science has demonstrated itself first in the natural sciences, but it cannot be confined there. The great point of concern for the social scientists is that they shall justify their use of the term "social sciences" by operating strictly as to assumptions, methodology, and statement of conclusions, in the true spirit of science. The temptation will be greater in their field to talk (and even to think, but especially to talk) unscientifically, as, for instance, to assume that certain words have a fixed content of meaning, and represent always the same thing in all places and times to all men. But the things that for the moment appear to divide the natural scientists from the social scientists are really superficial and passing phenomena; at bottom all science is one.

It is with this far-extending field of science that a very large part of all future educational programs will undoubtedly be concerned. About this there is no need to worry so long as scientists of every sort are honest with themselves and with us, and more particularly with their students. It is not enough to have men who have imbibed the scientific spirit merely cataloguing their results to our young people; the young people must themselves be introduced, not merely to science, but to the spirit of science. Otherwise, what they are taught will be just so much dogma, and will represent no improvement in the methods or the material of education over what the past has offered.

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But what is vast is not thereby necessarily complete; gigantism of all kinds is vast, but disappointing too. One may guess however that, in the intelligences of some who now look like as improbable converts as Saul the persecutor must have seemed to the early Christians, the idea will presently emerge from the very drabness of life itself under an exclusively scientific program that an important factor of living has been overlooked. Scientists of all types may begin to wonder whether Cinderella, whom they have steadily shoved into the kitchen to do the menial tasks of the household of learning, is not really a young lady of excellent family with a good deal of what it takes as well, perhaps even a Princess for whom a Prince Charming, in the shape of a revived public demand for nonscientific subjects, may arrive to rehabilitate her by a royal marriage. Scientists would probably like to have something to say about the marriage settlement; at all events they, or at least their wives, would think it nice to get an invitation to the wedding.

The development of this suspicion about Cinderella and her future is most likely to take place first in those academic institutions which have in these days of the Babylonian Exile retained, principally perhaps through the existence within them of certain staunchly endowed chairs stemming from the genteel past, some traces of the belief that, while the scientific spirit has opened the gates of so many new avenues in its real estate project, the approach to life through the portal of art is a natural response to an inherent and justifiable demand of humanity. After all, only a limited portion of the native intelligence of the race has gone into that particular type of creative energy emerging in the atomic bomb, with its curious and very instructive concomitant result of exhibiting to us certain first-class physicists on their knees, a most unusual attitude for scientists and especially physicists, imploring all of us, and particularly those who are social scientists, to do something and to do it fast, something which will ensure them a world for further ticklish experimentation. There are evidently limitations of a very marked kind in the domain of fissionary science, or, if no limitations, no world—a simple answer to so many problems but thought in some quarters to be too drastic. Relatively, a larger portion of intelligent men and women

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will in the future as in the past approach science through those less showy but at least equally valuable phases of natural observation now in temporary eclipse. Increasingly too, in a rapidly rising ratio, there will be those who come to know science through learning to apply the scientific method in the study of social relations. Yet even then, when all these are summed up in their imposing total, that total does not by any means account for all creative human talent.

III

A great deal of human intelligence of a very high order (let us not get into disputes about the "highest") has always gone, to put its contribution at the minimum, into the provision of entertainment and delight for humanity. To give it a deservedly juster rating than that, it has been applied for the expression of humanity's deepest and most basically conceived emotions, hope, joy, aspiration, belief, and contrariwise, despair, grief, gloom, mistrust, those mighty intangibles which, along with so many others, make up the significant life of man, no matter what the external conditions of his existence. As a realization of all this dawns again on humanity, as one feels it must if we are not to lose the causes of living in the quite secondary business of just keeping alive, then the other part of the educational program, the natural complement of the sciences, natural and social, will become perfectly clear. That other part is none other than the province of Cinderella, the College of the Arts, which has by now got buried under such a load of miscellaneous baggage that the figure of the poor kitchen-slavey at the center of this mass of impedimenta is scarcely recognizable. Let science continue to constitute the basis of the modern reaction against a system headed for extinction ever since the days when Sir Isaac Newton began with his *Principia* the process of bowing it out, paying it, however, the gentlemanly compliment of writing its epitaph in Latin. But let the College of the Arts be revived or cleaned out or made over, however you choose to describe the process, to serve the indestructible humanism of the race, clearly but not antagonistically set off from the sciences, natural and social, and let this be done,

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to prevent all later misunderstanding, by a clear statement of aims and purposes from the very beginning.

Thus you will have the College of the Natural Sciences, the College of the Social Sciences, and the College of the Arts; lay down the minimum you will require for a degree in each college, and give wide freedom in everything else. You will lose students from the Social Sciences to the Natural Sciences, and so, too, in reverse, and from both of them to the College of the Arts, just as you will find students from the College of the Arts migrating to one or the other of the Colleges of Science, and why not? Is education to go on being a concentration camp or to become a field of trial and error in the good life for the individual? Let boundaries be as nearly wide open as possible; travel should not require too many visas, nor too many frontier friskings by officious underlings. There is no need to fear for the rejuvenation of Cinderella from kitchen-maid to Princess, with intelligent public opinion for her Prince Charming, if only she is allowed to function for what she should be, and not compelled to serve so largely as a cheap dame-school mistress for science students required to assimilate a modicum of culture. Of course, she must acquire for the staff of her new ménage an administrative and teaching body who understand what the arts are, and what their function is in human life, and honestly believe that it is a function not less honorable than any other, and are willing to act accordingly. Incidentally it might sober the feeble college jester, eminent at alumni reunions, who claims to be able to recognize the College of the Arts "because there's no art in its courses," to discover that under the new régime the College of the Arts is just the very place where art, all art and all the arts, would properly be found!

IV

Ordinarily people think of art as achieving itself in very concrete ways, in stone and bronze and ivory for the sculptor, on canvas or wood or plaster in color and form and mass and light and shade for the painter, in the registering of sound through various wind and percussion devices on the organs of human audition for the musician. But there is another art even more fundamental to human existence than any of these, though because of

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the universality of man's participation in its employment, it often misses recognition when the roll of the arts is called; yet it is an art which on occasion has been regarded as the queen of them all, conscious and sentient beyond any of the rest, the *art of language*. Language, which is such a commonplace in the interchanges of everyday life in all its aspects, can become, as men have often discovered, suddenly transmuted into something more moving than a Rodin statue, more uplifting than a Gothic cathedral, more penetrating to man's heart of hearts than even the roll of the organ from far up under "the high embowèd roof." And when the utterance is not merely dependent on some happy chance of place and circumstance that dies as the place shifts and the circumstance varies, but actually enters into the eternities of existence, it is recognized by a sure instinct as a manifestation of the art of arts.

One cannot quote effectively on the printed page of a passing article in such a contention, and in any event different instances occur in the reckonings of different minds; yet it would be no great hazard to suggest the utterly basic quality of things like these: the speech of Hector to Andromache in the sixth *Iliad*, the description of Aeneas and the Sibyl standing by the waters of Styx in the sixth *Aeneid*, Francesca's words in the last lines of the fifth canto of the *Inferno*, "We do not come to this Thy table" in the Episcopal communion service, the ninety-first psalm and the ninth to seventeenth verses of the seventh chapter of the Apocalypse of St. John the Divine in the Authorized Version, the soliloquy in *Hamlet*, the Gettysburg dedication brevity of Abraham Lincoln, the post-Dunkirk resistance call of Winston Churchill to the people of Britain. Never be misled by the seeming bareness of passages like these; they are never more a part of art than when seeming to profess none, never more exquisitely beautiful even to the hurting point than when appearing devastatingly plain. There is an art of language, of that be sure. It depends on many things, choice of words and their arrangement, fashioning of the phrases which words combine to form, assonances, echoes, overtones and under-rhythms, matter expressed, matter apparently concealed and yet crying through the muted stops to the very vault of heaven. This art will be associated in the new program

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with the other arts, and in that august company there will be no argument about which of them occupies the highest place in the kingdom.

V

If the art of language is viewed more closely, it has two well-marked sides. There is first the study of the language, let us say Latin, with careful attention to the literary forms, both prose and verse, in which its productions have descended to us. These forms are both highly conventional and also elaborately artistic, and able teaching will conduct the student through a searching examination of the methodology of both the convention and the art-form. To the Romans these forms and conventions were extremely important; they constitute, in the opinion of eminent scholars, Rome's bid for the recognition of Latin as a great literary language, since she could not very well compete with Grecian subtlety and elegance, and was therefore bound to seek another avenue to fame. They are thus, in fact, the essential art of the Latin language, the very core of the whole thing, but how much attention have they received under that aspect in the past? Such a study would constitute a marvelous approach to the appreciation of the language, that appreciation often so vaguely talked about as though it were something quite ineffable or something on which it was hardly possible to be clear. I am thinking now of that type of professor who seems to have acquired, in the past at least, the reputation of a great literary interpreter by reading aloud *con amore* a passage of Homer or Shakespeare and adding, authoritatively: "That's *grand*, one of the grandest passages in all literature!" A class is entitled in the face of that to rise up as a unit and ask "Why?" That they have seldom done so is only another proof of the essentially pacific and long-suffering spirit of youth! No person would be regarded, in the educational program envisaged, as qualified to instruct in the art of language (classical, modern, or native-modern) who could not explain clearly and constructively *how* the language of literature is an art, both generally and in the specific passages commonly accepted as "great."

Again, in the second place, under the conception of language as an art, the teaching of composition in a foreign tongue becomes

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an entirely different thing from what it has too usually been in the pas; it ceases to be a highly skilled game of language-bridge, with a complicated set of rules controlling the play, and becomes a constructive art of self-expression through the medium of a language other than one's own. Not the *translation* of passages from English into this or that language is now the object, but rather the *creation* by the student of ideas expressed in that language-medium. It seems to me that creation is the humane view of the true end of composition in a language, in one's own as well as in a foreign tongue. The men of the Classical Renaissance were not, with the exception of the ingrained *Ciceroniani* whom Erasmus smote hip and thigh, primarily interested in displaying a smart technique with the formulae of Latin syntax as the pawns on the board, but rather in expressing themselves forcefully and originally on burning subjects of the day in the educated medium for general intercommunication.

It would be pleasant to begin all over again under the inspiration of some such ideas first to learn and thereafter to teach. As it was, I learned my Greek and Latin classics without any real conception of the place they had occupied in the world and without a hint from anyone that the conditions in my world were in process of undergoing a gradually accelerating change, which would necessarily affect in a most radical way the position of those ancient classics; I learned them as a traditional part of a traditional system. Of that I do not complain overmuch; after all, the whole system was traditional, and the Greek and the Latin classics were as good a part of it as any, definitely better than some, as, for example, better than the French and the German as taught in my habitat and in my school and college days. The classics were still drawing the best men to their teaching in the language field fifty years ago.

VI

In the course of a long teaching career I have been jolted completely out of the complacency that such an upbringing engendered, but not out of the conviction that there is sound and enduring value in language work, including the study of the Greek and the Latin classics. But the approach must be quite different. The classical

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languages are not any longer a practical training leading to high preferment in church or state, nor are they a social necessity for intercourse among gentlemen, but they form a most interesting and a most remarkably vital portion of the field in which the art of language should be, and so often is not, at work. Obviously to a large degree it is not thus at work because it fails to be conceived under the form of art. But that is the proper form under which to conceive it, and if that idea takes hold, the destruction of mere tradition, so rampant in many ways in all kinds of language teaching, will have been only the cause of the shaping of new pots for the more effective containing of old and very precious vintages.

It will be guessed that I am not very much impressed by most of the arguments put forward in good faith no doubt but not with much judgment, for the study of the classical languages, which generally means, of course, in our time, the study of Latin alone. The best reason why any student should study Latin is that Latin makes an appeal to him which cannot be met in any other way than by studying it. We consider that an excellent reason in the case of a student who elects to study science; he is interested in science and it makes its appeal to him, and so he studies it. It is true that his interest may be grossly utilitarian and gadgetary, if I may use such a word, and that science classes will have far more students of this type than of the type that will constitute the scientific elite of the future, but at all events in some way he is interested in science, and he wants to study it, and he does so. What one should be working for today in the interest of the art of language is to prevent ignorant and sometimes malicious administrative policies from denying, to the student to whom the art of language appeals above everything else, that educational opportunity to which in any decent organization of society he is fully entitled.

This applies to the student in any division of the art of language, of course, and the plea should be promptly rejected (for a plea is all that it can be called) that English and a modern language or two should be taught for "practical considerations." If the sciences, social and natural, want or need French and German for their "practical" purposes, they should provide that type of teaching for themselves in their own college organizations, since the sort of language work they desire has no connection with the art of lan-

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guage or with the roots of European culture. If scientific treatises happened to be written in Bantu and Tagalog, those are the languages which the sciences would no doubt require. Genuine instruction in French, for example, as a noble instrument of speech, as a beautiful instance of the art of language operating in the field of the finest criticism, should never be spoiled by a totally unnecessary contact with a purely utilitarian aim. No one should be clearer on this point than teachers of English and the modern languages themselves. The great trouble with them is that they have never succeeded in realizing that every administrative policy that deals unfavorably with the Greek and the Latin classics only defers its action against them until a more convenient season.

There are still professors of the sciences, probably still a majority of them, who believe that something is to be said for every sentence in a Ph.D. thesis having a principal verb in it, but there are also those who do not think it really matters. "Everybody knows what the student means; the fact is there; his diagram and his equations show that he understands it; what more do you want?" If this type of person comes to be in the majority in a faculty, the art of language has a poor lookout indeed unless it is being taught in a college absolutely its own, inaccessible to barbarians. Vandals were abroad in France in the thirteenth century when the universities of that country abolished the study of literature, the Latin classics that is, because the New Science had arrived which had a ready recipe for the salvation of the world without the art of language. It was Logic that was to save man and magnify him and lift him up forever. But of course it did not do so, because no theory that postulates entire devotion of the human mind to one single phase of life ever can magnify him or, in the end, even satisfy him. So the ultimate defeat of these gangsters of the educational world is predictable with certainty; the only trouble is that in the interval they can create a situation as silly today as that taken by the French universities in the thirteen hundreds, sillier, indeed, because by now we should know better.

VII

But silliness and obscurantism on the part of the leaders of one division of the human spirit's operations are not well met by equal

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silliness and obscurantism on the part of another set of leaders, and it is for that reason that workers in the art of language should clearly visualize the situation, recognize the defects and the inadequacies of their own views and methods, and think logically about their appropriate place in the educational program and about the best ways of serving society in that place. Nothing seems more certain than this, that no language department in our schools and colleges today is going to justify itself by relying on traditionalism; the whole world situation of the time cries eloquently to the contrary. Equally ill-advised is it to rest their case on "practical" defenses for the languages. It would be more "practical" for a powerful economic block like the United States of America and the British Empire states to insist on all business with them being done in English, and on all articles of scientific value being printed in English, preferably "basic." If there is any teacher of college English who can reconcile himself to a future of instructing in "basic," the mood assumed and the policies suggested in this article have no more meaning for him than sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. By the way, what *would* be the "basic" for that last magnificent "classic" phrase? Yet the situation of an English instructor so minded is no more absurd than that of an instructor in French who teaches would-be Ph.D's enough French to "get by" on a qualifying examination, or of a Latin instructor who thinks that the great argument for Latin is that it teaches you how to spell English.

Cinderella will never be a Princess again until she escapes from the hands of such relatives. If only she can meet up with a Prince Charming who is also intelligent! Just love is not enough, even though it may be "grand."

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